C.2

"Owd Jahn"

Told by W. A. Fraser, Pincher Creek, Alta.

"Yes, I'll show you how to fit horses, either for a show or for general use." This remark was heard in the bar-room of the old hotel in the little frontier town of Spitzee as two old cronies sat at a table off to one side and supped their glass of beer. One was an old-timer to the district while the other one, John, was a new-comer who had recently landed from England where he had operated a small farm in the lower Midlands, but had decided to try Canada as his next venture, so he settled here in the foothill district, took up a homestead and soon had enough stock around him to enable him to "feel at 'ome", as he said.

He wasn't long in fitting up a show of horses to his liking, and soon he and his wife, Hanna, were to be seen in town every Saturday with as fine a turnout of horses and democrat as would be found anywhere, well harnessed and groomed and well driven. But why shouldn't they be? Who was the owner and driver of the outfit - and was there a better one anywhere? Couldn't "Owd John" handle the ribbons in any company, and hadn't he done it in England in a far stiffer class than any they could procure here?

As they drove down the main street many stopped to see the team as they pranced along on the way to the big general store of the H. B. Company where the grocery order was placed by Mrs. B., who made it her business

each week to have her order filled so that there was always ample food on hand. John always saw to it that a small half-gallon stone jug was included so that it could be filled with the best brand of his favourite scotch whiskey, for in those days the Bay sold liquors along with every other commodity to be required in most countries.

When they were all ready for home John drove up to the side door of the store and the clerks loaded the box of groceries into the back of the democrat, John seeing that it was placed well forward behind the driver's seat; Han climbed in beside John and soon they were started home.

As they climbed out of the valley onto the level stretch above the horses increased their gait to a slow trot, gradually increasing it until a fairly good gait was struck. The roads were mostly over old prairie trails but in the low spots you would find the occasional culvert raised above the level of the road, and as the democrat hit this, and the horses had any speed up there was but one outcome, and all the contents of the rig went up somewhat so when John got the reins, which at the time were hanging over the dash, the team was soon pulled up and given a good sound lecture by John for their reckless speed as they slowed down to a smart walk.

John, on his part, absorbed whatever part of Han's lecture to him for such reckless driving and for such chances as they took in having the groceries so shaken up

or beyond severe jarring, and as she finished he reached back in the grocery box and got hold of the stone jug and held it to see if it was the same brand as the last. She ended her lecture by remarking she didn't knowif she would land back in the seat or behind it, or on the road behind the democrat, but didn't see that he cared so long as he was safely aboard, but he might not always be so fortunate.

In good time the ranch gate was reached and the team turned in. John got down to open it, letting his wife drive through, but when through she did not stop the rig so, when John shut the gate, the horses ran a few yards up towards the stable. John closed the gate and got on an extra spurt of speed to catch up so that he was nearly out of his wind when he reached out a hand to catch hold of the end gate. But when he thought he had, or should have had, hold of it it wasn't there. As Han, who had the reins in hand, would pull up tightly on them when he reached out to take hold of the end gate and the harness, the horses quickened their pace so John did not get the chance to have hold of something that would have been a welcome aid to him.

By the time the barn was reached and the team came to a stop and waited to be unhitched John, instead of doing so, swung off to the house and when he came out on the front porch he had his fowling piece across his arm as if going for game.

When she saw the shape things were taking she

decided to "leave the ship" and got down as fast as she could and started to run in a zig-zag shape towards the poplar bluff to one side of the barn. John now saw how things were going to turn out for him so he glanced down the barrels of his gun and saw the crooked course she was making and what a poor chance he would have in making a try. He called out: "Hi! hold on, Han. Run straight or I can't hit you," then pulled down his gun without pulling the trigger, turned and walked back to the house, accusing Han of being a poor sport.

In the meantime darkness had come down as Han made for the bluff and got through it and swung towards the house, which she entered from the rear without being noticed. She climbed up the stairs to a room when she was soon snugly in bed, slept soundly till morning and, while John stabled the horses, she got up as usual and made John's regular meal of bacon and eggs. When this was done she stepped into the room off the kitchen where John usually slept and told him to come and get it, which he did much as usual, but during the meal never mentioned anything of the night before or its happenings, but all the time kept wondering how Han enjoyed herself out in the poplar bluff on such a cool night.

However, in future, Han always stopped the team if John went to close, or open, any gate, and he always drove carefully if there were any cutbanks on the road when Han was in the seat beside him; and from then on the groceries were always in good shape when unpacked. Usually some of

Fraser (W. A.).

the mill boys were on hand when they arrived from town, and had to sample any special lines obtained during the day.